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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 MUSCAT 000536

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: ISRAELI MILITARY OPERATIONS IN PALESTINE,
LEBANON STRIFE, IRAQ SECTARIANISM

¶1. SUMMARY: Government-run daily "Oman" says Israel is the sole beneficiary of inter-Arab strife, whether in Lebanon or Palestine; privately owned "Al-Watan" worries that Likud's "weakness" spawns Israeli military operations in Palestine; "Oman" says that there is a "mutual responsibility" to achieve unity in Iraq. All dailies give prominent coverage to UAE President's visit to Muscat, and to Iran's nuclear program. Oman's first private radio station begins transmission. END SUMMARY.

COVERAGE

¶2. UAE President Sheikh Khalifa bin Zaid's visit to Muscat was covered by all local media, with coverage highlighting the desire of both countries to work towards strategic partnership. Yousuf Bin Alawi, Minister Responsible for Foreign Affairs, stated that "the talks between HM [Sultan Qaboos bin Said] and Sheikh Khalifa bin Zaid will have significant impact on bilateral relations." Also, the state-owned Arabic daily "Oman" carried editorials on bilateral relations between the UAE and Oman. In addition, local dailies continue to highlight the ongoing negotiations between the International Atomic Energy Agency and Iran.

¶3. Omani private media passed a milestone on May 23 with the start of new radio station Hala-FM (102.7), the Sultanate's first private broadcast outlet. Aimed primarily at a younger Omani audience, the station is currently carrying little but Arabic pop music, albeit a notably trendier and more current mix than that on the state-owned youth-oriented FM station. The station has no known plans for substantive news or public affairs programming.

BLOCK QUOTES: ISRAEL BENEFITS FROM LEBANON STRIFE

¶4. Government-owned Arabic daily "Oman" (circulation 38,000) expressed on May 24 its sadness and surprise about the confrontation between the Lebanese army and the so called "Fatah al Islam Movement" in a piece titled, "Lebanese Reconciliation is a National Necessity":

"The political conflict between the Lebanese army and the Fatah al-Islam movement raises many questions at a time when the Security Council is preparing to form an international committee to investigate the assassination of the former Lebanese President al Hariri. If no political measures are enacted to contain this crisis, the outcome will be very dangerous, because Israel will be

the only entity that benefits from the ongoing armed conflict, whether in Lebanon or Palestine. Thus logic and wisdom is called for from parties to the conflict, so that they forge an agreement by political means and shy away from using the language of violence. The scenes from Lebanon and Palestine in the last days have been painful and cruel for both the Palestinian and Lebanese people. It has been like a shock for everyone in the Arab world; these clashes are considered against the national interests of both countries. They challenge any agreements that will restore the peoples' rights and obviate political solutions to the disputes."

"NO NEGOTIATION PROGRAM" FOR ISRAEL

14. Privately owned Arabic daily "Al-Watan" (circulation 42,000) published on May 25 an editorial titled, "What is the Value of 'Statements' in Confronting Israel's 'Actions?'":

"Israel's violent measures in the Palestinian territories reflect one clear fact: this state does not possess any clear negotiation program, and its government does not have the authority and power to negotiate. Therefore, the Israeli side will continue to escalate the violence. Given Likud's weakness, Israel has no choice but to continue military operations in the Palestinian territories, destroying all infrastructure in cities and villages. Also, they are leading a vigorous arrest campaign against members of the Palestinian government regardless of the fact that their record is clean of any resistance against Israel. Age or physical condition does not matter, as with Sheikh Ahmed Yassin [Hamas leader assassinated by Israel in 2004], who despite his age and weakness faced a sad fate."

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IRAQI UNITY A "MUTUAL RESPONSIBILITY"

15. On May 25, "Oman" wrote about "Iraq and the Danger of Division":

"What is happening in Iraq now is out of control and is entering a dangerous stage through daily violence and the regular killing of Iraqi innocent citizens. This means that not only the concerned in Iraq, but also neighboring countries and the international community, should take the matter seriously and find solutions to contain it. The state of security chaos, instability, explosions, and militia actions is continuing and will have bad consequences for the region, not only on the Iraqi innocent people. Saving Iraq from the dangers of division is a mutual responsibility... Such division does not serve Iraq and its people, but rather serves only sectarianism. The main step towards solving this issue is that people of Iraq should consider reconciliation. They know their interests better than anyone. The whole world, especially the Arabs, can help them to successfully enter a new phase of security and rebuilding of their country."

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